"If it's flooded…" Occupational exposure to floodwater - what contributes to decisions to drive through?

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RATIONALE

- Just under half of all flood-related fatalities in Australia (45%) are attributed to people entering floodwater in motor vehicles.
- As the primary response agency for floods, storms, and tsunamis across Australia, State Emergency Service (SES) personnel are exposed to flooded roads whilst at work/on duty, or when traveling to/from work/duty.
- At an organisational level, alongside WH&S considerations, driving into floodwater in work vehicles can lead to significant financial impacts due to vehicle and equipment damage.
- With a cornerstone of public flood risk messaging being 'If it's flooded, forget it' SES agencies also risk reputational damage if they are seen to be flouting their own advice – especially if vehicles are damaged or require rescue.

AIMS

- To understand how SES personnel view the risks of driving into floodwater.
- To understand the circumstances in which SES personnel have entered floodwater on the road when in SES vehicles.
- To determine factors that relate to higher risk driving into floodwater on roads.

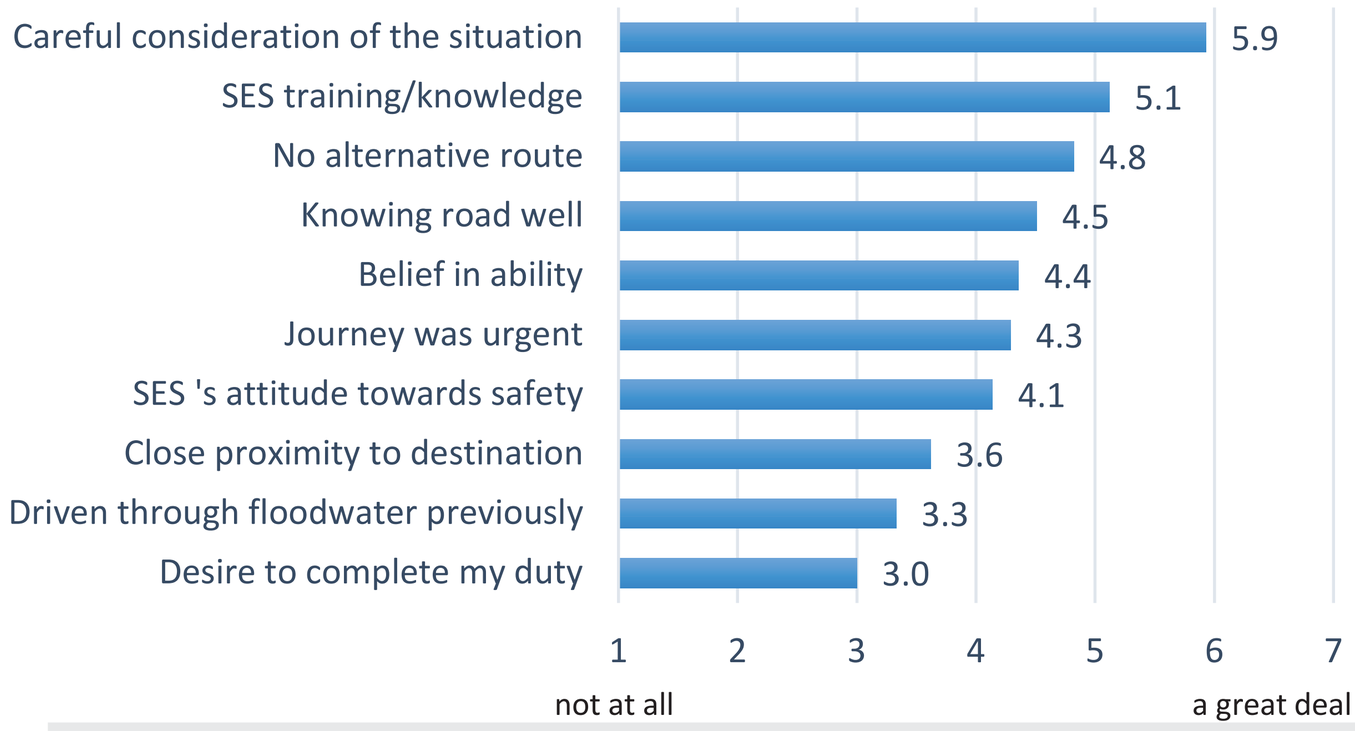
APPROACH

- Online survey developed with SES agencies from across Australia.
- Included demographics (e.g. experience, deployment, training), details of a recent experience of driving into floodwater, attitudes to risk, organisational safety climate.
- Data collection in two waves across multiple SES jurisdictions – first wave (reported here). Collection ongoing.

RESULTS

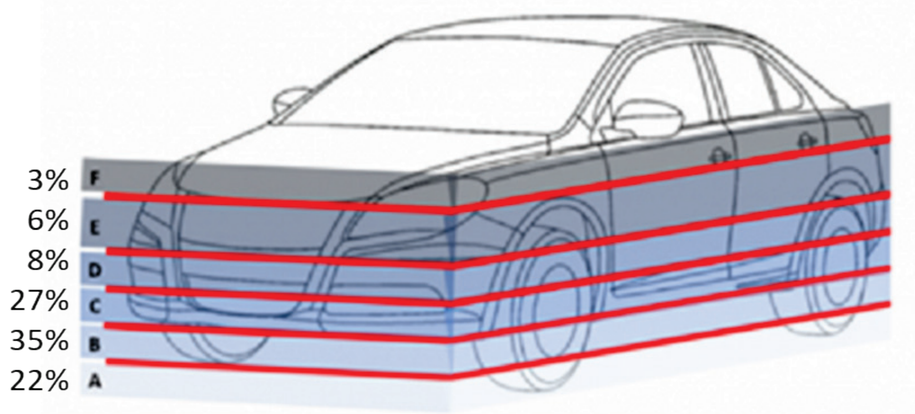
- 695 respondents in this analysis (data collection is ongoing).
- **In the last 2 years 35% had driven through floodwater in an SES vehicle as a driver**. 36% as a passenger, 49% had driven through in a private vehicle
- 272 respondents (39%) provided detailed information about a recent experience of driving/being driven through floodwater in an SES vehicle.
- 22% reported that passenger/s influenced decision to drive through.
- 47% drove into floodwater during an emergency response (no lights & sirens).

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DECISION TO DRIVE THROUGH FLOODWATER



HOW DEEP? HOW FAST?

- The majority drove through water less than 30cm deep (57%), and slow flow (47%)
- 9% drove through water more than 60cm deep, and 10% moderate or rapid flow



APPLICATION OF FINDINGS

- When data collection is finalised we will be analysing data to investigate the impacts of current training, work contexts, environmental conditions, and the personal characteristics that lead to riskier driving decisions.
- Findings have the potential to influence future training, WH&S policy development, and recruitment.

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